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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
SAN FRANCISCO DIVISION

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF
GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO, et
al.,

Case No. 3:25-cv-03698-SI

DECLARATION OF RICHARD J. FIESTA

Plaintiffs.

V.

DONALD J. TRUMP, in his official capacity
as President of the United States, et al..

Defendants.

DECLARATION OF RICHARD J. FIESTA

I, Richard J. Fiesta, declare as follows:

1. I am over 18 years of age and competent to give this declaration. This declaration is based on my personal knowledge, information, and belief.

5 2. I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans (“ARA” or
6 “Alliance”). Founded by the The Alliance is a grassroots organization with 4.4 million members,
7 including 950,000—nearly 300,000 of whom are retirees—in California. Founded by the AFL-
8 CIO Executive Council in 2001, ARA has 40 state alliances and members across the country, in
9 every state. ARA’s members are from all walks of life. We are former teachers, industrial workers,
10 state and federal government workers, construction workers, and community leaders—all united in
11 the belief that every American deserves a secure and dignified retirement after a lifetime of hard
12 work.

13 3. ARA's work includes educating the public and policymakers about critical issues
14 facing older Americans and working families, such as retirement security, health care, housing,
15 transportation, and consumer protection. We have worked closely with leaders at the federal, state,
16 and local levels to ensure that seniors' issues like retirement security and prescription drug prices
17 get the attention they deserve. ARA provides the following services to its members: information
18 on issues of importance to retirees on issues such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid,
19 prescription drug pricing, pension and retirement policy in the form of fact sheets, issue briefs,
20 live webinars with policy experts, state and local chapter meetings often with expert speakers,
21 social media posts, an annual congressional voting record on retiree issues; Advocacy and media
22 training; and opportunities for community engagement and service.

23 4. Members join ARA in a few ways, including through retiree programs sponsored
24 by national unions, through similar programs run by union locals that work with ARA state
25 chapters, and as individuals who pay dues directly to ARA.

26 5. Our members are older and among the Americans most vulnerable to exploitation.
27 Each year, millions of elderly Americans are the target of financial fraud and other scams. Elderly
28 Americans are particularly attractive targets for scammers: they are often trusting and polite; may

1 be less technologically adept; and are more likely to have financial savings, own a home, and have
2 good credit. As one recent FBI report found, scams targeting individuals sixty and older led to at
3 least \$3.4 billion in losses in 2023.

4 6. ARA has members who receive Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance
5 benefits from the Social Security Administration (“SSA”) and Medicare. We also have members
6 who worked in state or local governments previously not covered by Social Security because that
7 jurisdiction opted not to participate in Social Security and some survivor spouses who are now
8 eligible for increased Social Security benefits under the Social Security Fairness Act, which went
9 into effect on February 25, 2025. To get benefits, these members will now have to apply.

10 7. We have heard from countless members over the past two months about issues at
11 SSA since their staff reductions began, including extremely long wait times to reach SSA
12 employees on the SSA 800-number, being unable to access the SSA website to apply for benefits
13 online, having difficulty making in-person appointments, and not being allowed to walk in to field
14 offices without an appointment. This all comes on top of SSA being a historically underfunded,
15 understaffed agency. Our members who could not get through to SSA during this period were
16 reaching out because, among other issues, they needed a duplicate 1099 tax form to complete their
17 2024 tax return or a new Social Security card, or they were trying to change the bank account for
18 direct deposit of monthly benefits. But they were unable to obtain timely assistance from the SSA.

19 8. This problem is going to get far worse if SSA reduces its staff further. If something
20 happens to ARA members’ benefits, such as they are defrauded, scammed or incorrectly listed as
21 dead, they will be hard-pressed—in light of cuts to the agency—to get them back easily or
22 quickly.

23 9. For many of our members, Social Security and other benefits facilitated by SSA are
24 a large part of their retirement income. Social Security is a program that our members care about a
25 lot and that they have paid into for most of their lives. Because Social Security is such an
26 important economic lifeline, they pay attention to what is going on at the SSA and are troubled by
27 anything that may harm the SSA. SSA is currently trying to move people away from calling the
28 800-number by requiring beneficiaries to go to the website or office to change their bank

1 information. They say they are doing it because of fraud concerns, but for retirees who are not
 2 comfortable using the SSA website, that means they will need to go into a field office for an issue
 3 they could have previously addressed from home by phone.

4 10. ARA members have inundated our national office and state chapters to ask
 5 questions about if their Social Security Benefits will be impacted or to express concerns about
 6 difficulties accessing the SSA website due outages, multi-hour wait times on the 800-number,
 7 setting appointments months out, and not being able to walk into a field office without an
 8 appointment, and to ask what they can and should do to be able to access benefits. Addressing
 9 these member concerns has required us to divert substantial resources away from our other work
 10 to advise members as to how they can best protect themselves.

11 11. I have read reports that even though the SSA is at a 50-year staffing low, the SSA
 12 is planning to lay off through a large-scale Reduction-In-Force (“RIF”) 7,000 SSA employees and
 13 close offices as part of a Reorganization Plan. ARA is very concerned about further reductions
 14 when in the past month or two conditions at the SSA have already drastically deteriorated for
 15 beneficiaries.

16 12. On March 25, 2025, the Washington Post reported on the difficulties people were
 17 experiencing trying to contact SSA due to the recent staff departures, explaining the SSA “website
 18 crashed four times in 10 days this month because the servers were overloaded,” “managers have
 19 resorted to answering phones in place of receptionists because so many employees have been
 20 pushed out,” SSA “no longer has a system to monitor customer experience because that office was
 21 eliminated as part of the cost-cutting efforts led by Elon Musk,” and “the phones keep ringing.
 22 And ringing.” A true and correct copy of the March 25 article, which is also available at
 23 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/03/25/social-security-phones-doge-cuts/>, is
 24 attached hereto as Exhibit A.

25 13. On April 7, 2025, the Washington Post published an article entitled “Social
 26 Security website keeps crashing, as DOGE demands cuts to IT staff”, which discussed the SSA
 27 website crashes that ARA members have been reporting to us. A true and correct of the April 7
 28

1 article, which is also available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/07/social-
2 security-website-crashes-musk-trump/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/07/social-security-website-crashes-musk-trump/), is attached hereto as Exhibit B. The article reported:

3 The website has crashed repeatedly in recent weeks, with outages lasting anywhere
4 from 20 minutes to almost a day, according to six current and former officials with
5 knowledge of the issues. Even when the site is back online, many customers have
6 not been able to sign in to their accounts — or have logged in only to find
7 information missing. For others, access to the system has been slow, requiring
8 repeated tries to get in.

9 The article points out that even with the SSA's website problems reoccurring, DOGE was
10 recommending a 50% cut to SSA's IT personnel: "The new demands from Musk's U.S. DOGE
11 Service include a 50 percent cut to the technology division responsible for the website and other
12 electronic access."

13 14. The next day, on April 8, there was an article on NBC Chicago 5's website entitled
14 "Atypical": Social Security Administration reveals what it says caused website errors," which
15 reported on SSA's response to the Washington Post's April 7 article. A true and correct copy of
16 the NBC article, which is also available at [https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/atypical-
17 social-security-administration-reveals-what-caused-website-errors/3717120/](https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/atypical-social-security-administration-reveals-what-caused-website-errors/3717120/), is attached hereto as
18 Exhibit C. On X (formerly Twitter), the SSA confirmed the SSA website outage: "SSA website
19 went down because of atypical high volume and it's a 1979 platform. It had nothing to do with
20 DOGE. In fact, this problem has alerted to an issue that DOGE will promptly fix." The article
21 further reported that SSA had plans underway to launch a public dashboard for showing system
22 performance. On April 27, I checked SSA's website's performance page, and did not see any
23 metrics or data for SSA's website performance.

24 15. On April 8, CBS News reported that during the prior week, the SSA website
25 mistakenly informed some Supplemental Security Income recipients, who are disabled Americans
26 and low-income senior citizens, "currently not receiving payments," causing great concern to SSI
27 recipients and their family members. The problem was corrected, but the SSA spokesperson's
28 response was this was no cause for alarm because the website error did not impact Social Security

1 or Medicare-only beneficiaries. A true and correct copy of the April 8 CBS News article, which is
2 also available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/social-security-doge-ssi-error-message-currently-not-receiving-payments/>, is attached hereto as Exhibit D.

4 16. Also, on April 8, The New York Times reported in an article entitled “Just a
5 Mess’: Staff Cuts, Rushed Changes and Anxiety at Social Security” about long lines at SSA field
6 offices. A true and correct copy of the April 8 NYT article, which is also available at
7 <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/08/us/social-security-trump.html>, is attached hereto as Exhibit
8 E. The article reported “Waves of buyouts and early retirements have hobbled the staff at many
9 local offices, and recipients say it has become harder to use the agency’s website and phone
10 systems, or even be seen in person.” These are the reports that match what we are hearing from
11 ARA members. Each week as more and more SSA staff leave, the wait times on the phone and
12 field offices increase and strain the website, which has unprecedented outages. I have closely
13 monitored SSA for 24 years, and there have never been this many website outages or difficulties
14 being seen in a field office as have occurred in the past month. The Times further reported “more
15 than three dozen offices are losing at least a quarter of their employees, with many located in rural
16 areas,” and in the past SSA has closed offices when they lose too many employees. Traveling
17 further to meet with SSA claims representatives, particularly as they try to move away from using
18 the 800-number, will make it more challenging and time-consuming for ARA members to correct
19 benefits issues.

20 17. On April 9, 2025, WBNS reported that “Wait times are increasing and so are the
21 number of callers who never speak to an agent.” The report explained: “According to SSA data
22 available on Wednesday, March saw more than 483,000 calls per day into the call center.
23 However, just 39% of those callers reached a representative. That’s down from May 2024, when
24 70% of callers reached a representative.” A true and correct copy of the WBNS article, which is
25 also available at <https://www.10tv.com/article/news/local/social-security-callers-long-wait-times-disconnections/530-611caf89-44cd-42e1-86c5-19ab6f31bdfe>, is attached hereto as Exhibit F. I
26 have never previously seen a majority of calls go unanswered.
27
28

1 18. On April 22, 2025, NPR station WBEZ Chicago reported on long lines outside a
 2 local SSA office in Evanston, Illinois, while the SSA plans to shutter 47 SSA offices nationwide,
 3 including 26 this month, and has already laid out plans to lay off thousands of workers. A true and
 4 correct copy of the April 22 WBEZ article, which is also available at
 5 [https://www.wbez.org/money/2025/04/22/social-security-benefits-donald-trump-elon-musk-](https://www.wbez.org/money/2025/04/22/social-security-benefits-donald-trump-elon-musk-office-evanston-kenwood-logan-square)
 6 [office-evanston-kenwood-logan-square](https://www.wbez.org/money/2025/04/22/social-security-benefits-donald-trump-elon-musk-office-evanston-kenwood-logan-square), is attached hereto as Exhibit G.

7 19. On April 23, 2025, the Daily Beast reported that Social Security beneficiaries had
 8 lost benefits because DOGE mistakenly listed them as dead. A true and correct copy of the April
 9 23 article, which is also available at [https://www.thedailybeast.com/doges-social-security-cuts-](https://www.thedailybeast.com/doges-social-security-cuts-create-chaotic-day-of-the-dead-living/)
 10 [create-chaotic-day-of-the-dead-living/](https://www.thedailybeast.com/doges-social-security-cuts-create-chaotic-day-of-the-dead-living/), is attached hereto as Exhibit H. According to the article,
 11 “About 4 million people [were] marked them as dead. But they’re not sure if those people were
 12 supposed to be marked as dead, so they’re sending us an email saying, ‘If these people come into
 13 the office with their identification, you can reinstate them.’” The article notes it takes three to four
 14 days before an individual’s benefits can be restored. We know of at least one member who was
 15 mistakenly marked as deceased during this time period.

16 20. As result of the Reorganization Plan, the closed offices will require retirees or those
 17 with disabilities to travel further to receive in person assistance or to correct errors, like being
 18 placed on a dead list or being a victim of a scam.

19 21. As a result of the planned RIF, 800-number wait times will get longer, more calls
 20 will go unanswered, lines will be longer outside of offices, and people will have to wait longer for
 21 their applications to be processed and problems to be corrected. Social Security benefits are not
 22 retroactive, so any delay in submitting an application falls on the beneficiary, who will never
 23 recover benefits during the period when they were waiting to be assisted by the SSA.

24 22. In the very short term, ARA members’ anxiety and concern about the continued
 25 stability of a primary source of retirement income will grow. As they seek reassurance from the
 26 SSA offices, 800-number, or website, their concern may grow because of the long waits and
 27 outages.

1 23. I have interacted with the SSA since 2001 and have experienced prior government
2 shutdowns. The RIF will take services to worse than shutdown levels. During prior shutdowns,
3 claims specialists in field offices were designated essential employees and continued to work, so
4 there was not much backlog at the end of the shutdown. A large-scale RIF impacting field offices
5 will lead to permanent delays and a snowballing backlog of applications.

6 24. During the 2018 reorganization plan that occurred during the first President Trump
7 Administration, ARA provided extensive comments about SSA during the public comment period.
8 If the current plans were published in the Federal Register for notice and comment, ARA would
9 again provide comment on these RIF and Reorganization plans because they will demolish any
10 trust in the Agency, greatly interfere with beneficiaries access to their benefits, and will cause
11 retirees to experience collateral consequences from going without essential payments.

13 I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States that the foregoing is
14 true and correct. Executed April 28, 2025, in Washington, D.C.

Richard J. Pietsch

RICHARD J. FIESTA

Exhibit A

Democracy Dies in Darkness

The Trump Presidency

Long waits, waves of calls, website crashes: Social Security is breaking down

A flood of cuts led by Elon Musk has sent the agency into chaos as a new commissioner prepares to take charge.

March 25, 2025

By [Lisa Rein](#) and [Hannah Natanson](#)

The Social Security Administration website crashed four times in 10 days this month because the servers were overloaded, blocking millions of retirees and disabled Americans from logging in to their online accounts. In the field, office managers have resorted to answering phones in place of receptionists because so many employees have been pushed out. Amid all this, the agency no longer has a system to monitor customer experience because that office was eliminated as part of the cost-cutting efforts led by Elon Musk.

And the phones keep ringing. And ringing.

The federal agency that delivers \$1.5 trillion a year in earned benefits to 73 million retired workers, their survivors, and poor and disabled Americans is engulfed in crisis — further undermining the already struggling organization’s ability to provide reliable and quick service to vulnerable customers, according to internal documents and more than two dozen current and former agency employees and officials, customers and others who interact with Social Security.

Financial services executive Frank Bisignano is scheduled to face lawmakers Tuesday at a Senate confirmation hearing as President Donald Trump’s nominee to become the permanent commissioner. For now, the agency is run by a caretaker leader in his sixth week on the job who has raced to push out more than 12 percent of the staff of 57,000. He has conceded that the agency’s phone service “sucks” and acknowledged that Musk’s U.S. DOGE Service is really in charge, pushing a single-minded mission to find benefits fraud despite vast evidence that the problem is overstated.

The turmoil is leaving many retirees, disabled claimants, and legal immigrants needing Social Security cards with less access or shut out of the system altogether, according to those familiar with the problems.

“What’s going on is the destruction of the agency from the inside out, and it’s accelerating,” Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) said in an interview. “I have people approaching me all the time in their 70s and 80s, and they’re beside themselves. They don’t know what’s coming.”

King’s home state has the country’s oldest population. “What they’re doing now is unconscionable,” he said.

Help us report on DOGE

The Washington Post wants to hear from people affected by DOGE activities at federal agencies. You can contact our reporters by email or Signal encrypted message:

Ellen Nakashima: ellen.nakashima@washpost.com or Ellen.626 on Signal.

Hannah Natanson: hannah.natanson@washpost.com or (202) 580-5477 on Signal.

[Read more about how to use Signal and other ways to securely contact The Post.](#)

Leland Dudek, who became acting commissioner after he fed data to Musk's team behind his bosses' backs, has issued a series of rapid-fire policy changes that have created chaos for front-line staff. Under pressure from the secretive Musk team, Dudek has pushed out dozens of officials with years of expertise in running Social Security's complex benefit and information technology systems. Others have left in disgust.

The moves have upended an agency that, despite the popularity of its programs, has been underfunded for years, faces potential insolvency in a decade and has been led by four commissioners in five months — just one of them Senate-confirmed. The latest controversy came last week when Dudek threatened to shut down operations in response to a federal judge's ruling against DOGE that he claimed would leave no one in the agency with access to beneficiaries' personal information.

Trump presidency

Follow [live updates on the Trump administration](#). We're tracking [Trump's progress on campaign promises](#) and [legal challenges to his executive orders and actions](#).

Alarmed lawmakers are straining to answer questions back home from angry constituents. Calls have flooded into congressional offices. AARP announced Monday that more than 2,000 people a week have called the retiree organization since early February — double the usual number — with concerns about whether benefits they paid for during their working careers will continue. Social Security is the primary source of income for about 40 percent of older Americans.

Trump has said repeatedly that the administration “won’t touch” Social Security, a promise that aides say applies to benefit levels that can be adjusted only by Congress. But in just six weeks, the cuts to staffing and offices have already taken a toll on access to benefits, officials and advocates say.

‘Creating a fire’

With aging technology systems and a \$15 billion budget that has stayed relatively flat over a decade, Social Security was already struggling to serve the public amid an explosion of retiring baby boomers. The staff that reviews claims for two disability programs was on life support following massive pandemic turnover — and still takes 233 days on average to review an initial claim.

But current and former officials, advocates and others who interact with the agency — many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution — said Social Security has been damaged even further by the rapid cuts and chaos of Trump's first two months in office. Many current and former officials fear that the push is part of a long-sought effort by conservatives to privatize all or part of the agency.

"They're creating a fire to require them to come and put it out," said one high-ranking official who took early retirement this month.

Dudek, who was elevated from a mid-level data analyst in the anti-fraud office, hurried to cut costs when he took over in mid-February, canceling research contracts, offering early-retirement incentives and buyouts across the agency, and consolidating programs and regional offices. Entire offices, including those handling civil rights and modernization, were driven out. The 10 regional offices that oversee field operations were slashed to four.

"I do not want to destroy the agency," he said in an interview Monday. "The president wants it to succeed by cutting out the red tape to improve service while improving security."

Musk's Department of Government Efficiency team began poring through Social Security's massive trove of private data on millions of Americans, working in a fourth-floor conference room at the Woodlawn, Maryland, headquarters, with blackout curtains on the windows and an armed security guard posted outside.

At first, the DOGE team was obsessed by false claims that millions of deceased people were receiving benefits. Then came new mandates designed to address alleged fraud: Direct-deposit transactions and identity authentication, operations that affect almost everyone receiving benefits, will no longer be able to be done by phone. Customers with computers will go through the process online; those without will wait in line at their local field office. A change announced internally last week will require legal immigrants with authorization to work in the United States and newly naturalized citizens to apply for or update their Social Security cards in person, eliminating a long-standing practice that sent the cards automatically through the mail.

"We realize this is a significant change and there will be a significant impact to customers," Doris Diaz, deputy commissioner of operations, told the field staff Monday during a briefing on the changes, a recording of which was obtained by The Washington Post. She said the agency was "working on a process" for homeless and homebound customers who cannot use computers or come into an office — and acknowledged that service levels will decline.

In the weeks before that briefing, phone calls to Social Security surged — with questions from anxious customers wondering whether their benefits had been or would be cut and desperate to get an in-person field office appointment. That is, if they could get through to a live person.

Depending on the time of day, a recorded message tells callers their wait on hold will last more than 120 minutes or 180 minutes. Some callers report being on hold for four or five hours. A callback function was available only three out of 12 times a Post reporter called the toll-free line last week, presumably because the queue that day was so long that the call would not be returned by close of business.

The recording that 66-year-old Kathy Martinez heard when she called the toll-free number two weeks ago from the San Francisco Bay Area said her hold time would be more than three hours — she was calling to ask what her retirement benefits would come to if she filed for them now or waited until she turned 70. She hung up and tried again last week at 7 a.m. Pacific time. The wait was more than 120 minutes, but she was offered a callback option, and in two hours she spoke with a “phenomenally kind person who called me,” she said.

Martinez said she wants to wait to file for benefits to maximize her check. But “I’m kind of thinking, I wonder if I should take it now. When I apply, I will do it over the phone. But will there still be a phone system?”

‘Not acceptable’

Aging, inefficient phone systems have dogged Social Security for years. A modernization contract with Verizon begun under the first Trump administration suffered multiple delays, system crashes and other problems. As commissioner in the last year of the Biden administration, former Maryland governor Martin O’Malley moved the project to a new contractor, Amazon Web Services, and data shows that the average wait time for the toll-free line was down to 50 minutes, half of today’s average. But O’Malley ran out of time to switch the new system to field office phones, he said.

Now a perfect storm has overtaken the system. Turnover that’s normally higher than 10 percent has worsened at the 24 call centers across the country. Some employees took early retirement and buyout offers — a number that Dudek said was “not huge” but that current and former officials estimate could be significant.

Shonda Johnson, a vice president at the American Federation of Government Employees Council 220 who represents 5,000 call center staffers, said low pay (starting salary is \$32,000 a year), anger at a return-to-office mandate after years of telework, rapid policy changes, and frustration with how the Trump administration is treating federal employees have hurt morale to the point that people aren’t giving their all to the job.

“When you’re facing threats yourself, it kind of prevents you from being totally there for the public you’re servicing,” she said.

Asked about worsening phone service, Dudek told reporters in a call last week that “a 24 percent answer rate is not acceptable.”

“I want people who want to get to a person to get to a person,” he said, adding that “all options are on the table” to improve phone service, including outsourcing some call center work.

The new limits on phone transactions take effect at the end of the month, but field offices have been deluged for weeks, even as DOGE is targeting an unspecified number of field and hearing offices for closure over the next three years.

In one office in central Indiana, the phone lines are jammed by 9 a.m. with hundreds of retirees, further taxing a staff of less than a dozen that is responsible for nearly 70,000 claimants across the state, according to one employee. That worker, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution, said the questions have become predictable: What is the U.S. DOGE Service doing to Social Security? Will the office close? Will my benefits continue?

The employees, with no training yet on the impending changes, have few answers. "I hope we're going to be here," the employee tells caller after caller. "But I can't guarantee anything."

Complicated benefits cases are falling by the wayside, the employee said. Online claims, which are completed by field staff, are piling up.

"There is just no time to breathe or get anything else done," she said. "We used to be efficient."

Another employee in a regional office said the staff was told at a recent briefing that field offices across the country are seeing "exponential growth" in foot traffic. The elderly are not only calling but showing up at buildings to ask about the DOGE-led changes.

In one Philadelphia office, the federal government's return-to-office edict has left 1,200 staffers competing for about 300 parking spots, according to an employee. Staffers wake up as early as 4:30 a.m. to try to snag a space, and some are buying backup spots for \$200 a month nearby. As morale has cratered, some employees have stopped wearing business clothes and now come to work in jeans and a T-shirt because, as they tell colleagues, they no longer take pride in their work, the employee said.

'Off the charts'

Scammers are already taking advantage of the chaotic moment, according to internal emails obtained by The Post. Last week, employees in several offices were warned that seniors were reporting receiving emails from accounts pretending to be linked to Social Security. The messages asked recipients to verify their identity to keep receiving benefits.

"Sounds like scammers are jumping on this press release to trick the elderly," one Social Security staffer wrote to colleagues Thursday, referring to the agency's announcement of the in-person verification program.

In Baltimore, an employee who works on critical payment systems said nearly a quarter of his team is already gone or will soon be out the door as a result of resignations and retirements. Talented software developers and analysts were quick to secure high-paying jobs in the private sector, he said — and the reduction in highly skilled staff is already having consequences.

His office is supposed to complete several software updates and modernization processes required by law within the next few weeks and months, he said. But with the departures, it seems increasingly likely that it will miss those deadlines.

His team is also called on to fix complicated technology glitches that stop payments. But many of the experts who make those fixes are exiting.

“That has to get cleaned up on a case-by-case basis, and the experts in how to do that are leaving,” the Baltimore employee said. “We will have cases that get stuck, and they’re not going to be able to get fixed. People could be out of benefits for months.”

Meanwhile, a DOGE-imposed spending freeze has left many field offices without paper, pens and phone headsets — at the exact moment phone calls are spiking, the employee in Indiana said.

The freeze drove all federal credit cards to a \$1 limit, and purchasers for the agency were reduced to about a dozen people for 1,300 offices, said one employee in the Northeast.

These purchasers must get a green light from higher-ups for anything other than 12 specific preapproved transactions, according to emails obtained by The Post. The list includes “shipping costs,” “phone bills,” “Legionella testing” and “services to support fire safety and emergency response.” It does not include basic office supplies.

The field office in Portland, Oregon, is so slammed that the claims staff has told advocates to send questions or information by fax because they can’t get to the phones, according to Chase Stowell, case management supervisor for Assist, a nonprofit that helps disabled people apply for benefits. Many of them are homeless.

“The attrition rates in Portland are off the charts,” Stowell said. “They just don’t pick up the phone. They were already short-staffed. They’ve told us they just don’t trust that there’s a reliable system to get ahold of them by voicemail.”

The service issues keep bubbling up to members of Congress. Hundreds of Maryland residents turned out for a town hall meeting last week hosted by Baltimore County Council member Pat Young about a mile from Social Security headquarters.

Asked by one retiree in the audience to provide “a little bit of hope” that his Social Security benefits would not be cut, Sen. Angela Alsobrooks (D-Maryland) conceded, “The truth of the matter is that we don’t know what they intend.”

Jeff Stein contributed to this report.

What readers are saying

The comments express strong criticism of Elon Musk and Donald Trump, blaming them for the intentional dismantling of the Social Security Administration (SSA). Many commenters believe that Musk's cost-cutting measures, supported by Trump, are designed to create chaos within the... [Show more](#)

This summary is AI-generated. AI can make mistakes and this summary is not a replacement for reading the comments.

Exhibit B

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Social Security website keeps crashing, as DOGE demands cuts to IT staff

The worsening problems come as Elon Musk's DOGE team pushes for more cuts at the agency, including in the department that oversees the website.

April 7, 2025

By [Lisa Rein](#), [Hannah Natanson](#) and [Elizabeth Dwoskin](#)

Retirees and disabled people are facing chronic website outages and other access problems as they attempt to log in to their online Social Security accounts, even as they are being directed to do more of their business with the agency online.

The website has crashed repeatedly in recent weeks, with outages lasting anywhere from 20 minutes to almost a day, according to six current and former officials with knowledge of the issues. Even when the site is back online, many customers have not been able to sign in to their accounts — or have logged in only to find information missing. For others, access to the system has been slow, requiring repeated tries to get in.

The problems come as the Trump administration's cost-cutting team, led by Elon Musk, has imposed a downsizing that's led to 7,000 job cuts and is preparing to push out thousands more employees at an agency that serves 73 million Americans. The new demands from Musk's U.S. DOGE Service include a 50 percent cut to the technology division responsible for the website and other electronic access.

Many of the network outages appear to be caused by an expanded fraud check system imposed by the DOGE team, current and former officials said. The technology staff did not test the new software against a high volume of users to see if the servers could handle the rush, these officials said.

The technology issues have been particularly alarming for some of the most vulnerable Social Security customers. For almost two days last week, for example, many of the 7.4 million adults and children receiving monthly benefits under the anti-poverty program known as Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, confronted a jarring message that claimed they were "currently not receiving payments," agency officials acknowledged in an internal email to staff.

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The Washington Post wants to hear from people affected by DOGE activities at federal agencies. You can contact our reporters by email or Signal encrypted message.

Meryl Kornfield: meryl.kornfield@washpost.com or (301)-821-2013 on Signal.

Hannah Natanson: hannah.natanson@washpost.com or (202) 580-5477 on Signal.

Read more about how to use Signal and other ways to securely contact The Post.

The error messages set off widespread panic until recipients discovered that their monthly checks had still been deposited in their bank accounts. Another breakdown disabled the SSI system for much of the day on Friday, prompting claims staff to cancel appointments because they could not enter new disability claims in the system and blocking some already receiving benefits from gaining access to their accounts.

“Social Security’s response has been, ‘Oops,’” said Darcy Milburn, director of Social Security and health-care policy at the Arc, a national nonprofit that advocates for people with disabilities. The group fielded dozens of calls last week from nervous clients who saw the inaccurate message and assumed their monthly check, usually paid on the first of the month, would not arrive.

“It’s woefully insufficient when we’re talking about a government agency that’s holding someone’s lifeline in their hands,” Milburn said.

The disruptions are occurring as acting commissioner Leland Dudek and the DOGE team move to lay off large swaths of the workforce in a new phase of downsizing. Thousands of employees already have been pushed out — many in customer-facing roles, others with expertise in the agency’s cumbersome technology systems. At least 800 of the 3,000 employees left in the division that manages all of the Social Security databases face layoffs, a senior official said on Friday. The newly named chief information officer, Scott Coulter, a Musk-aligned private equity analyst, has demanded a cut of 50 percent, the official said.

The network outages are one in a cascade of blows to customer service that also have hobbled phone systems and field office operations as the workforce shrinks.

A surge in visitors to the website is overwhelming the computer system as customers — nervous that the rapid changes at the agency will compromise their benefits — download their benefit and earnings statements and attempt to file claims. President Donald Trump has said that his administration will not reduce Social Security benefits.

The chaos could accelerate starting April 14, when new identification measures are set to take effect that will require millions of customers applying for benefits to authenticate their identity online, part of the administration’s campaign to root out allegedly fraudulent claims.

“We’re just spiking like crazy,” said one senior official, who, like others in this article, spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about agency operations. “It’s people who are terrified that DOGE is messing with our systems. It’s the sheer massive volume of freaked-out people.”

The Social Security press office said in a statement that officials are “actively investigating the root cause” of the incidents, which they called “brief disruptions” averaging about 20 minutes each with the exception of the SSI error message. But on several occasions, including during an outage last Monday, customers were shut out of the website for hours. The system was back online last Monday after two hours, but lingering issues lasted through the afternoon while all backlogged queries were processed, current and former officials said. And a system upgrade on a Saturday in late March took several hours longer than anticipated and knocked out the network.

Three times in a recent 10-day stretch, the online systems the field office staff rely on to serve the public have crashed, said one employee in an Indiana office.

The downed programs included tools employees use to schedule visits, to see who has booked an appointment and to check who has arrived, the employee said. It is unheard-of for the system to fail this often, and each outage has led to chaos, they said.

Suddenly forced offline as they were taking claims, the staff members scribbled down clients’ information, then had to wait until later to load it into the computer, doubling or tripling the amount of time and work involved, the employee said.

In other instances, managers or security guards improvised a solution after the online scheduling system failed, the employee said. They walked out to the reception area, wrote down numbers on paper slips and started handing them out to people waiting in line.

The network crashes appear to be caused by an expansion initiated by the Trump team of an existing contract with a credit-reporting agency that tracks names, addresses and other personal information to verify customers’ identities. The enhanced fraud checks are now done earlier in the claims process and have resulted in a boost to the volume of customers who must pass the checks.

But the technology staff did not test the software against a high volume of users to see if the servers could handle the rush, current and former officials said. Connectivity issues and bugs with the expanded system have caused the portal that manages log-ins and authentication for many Social Security applications to go down, officials said.

At a weekly operations meeting on March 28 that was made public last week, Wayne Lemon, deputy chief information officer for infrastructure and IT operations, acknowledged the network crashes and said, “While they’ve been brief, we prefer no outages.” He said the outages were under investigation and may involve “challenges we’ve experienced with a number of partners.” Part of the problem may be that the outages have occurred during “high volume use of the network.”

“Is there a spike in demand or something in the environment causing the issues?” Lemon said.

Customers, meanwhile, are growing more frustrated.

In Upland, California, 72-year-old Kathy Stecher began trying to apply for retirement benefits more than a week ago. One of her first steps was to visit the Social Security website to book a required appointment at her local field office, because she believed she had to authenticate her identity in person first.

But over several days stretching from last month through Wednesday, the website wouldn't let Stecher schedule a visit. The site displayed a small bar reading, "Make an appointment," she said, but whenever she clicked on it, nothing happened.

When she finally reached someone on the phone, the website's booking tool wasn't working, she said. The employee sighed and told her that similar problems have become routine, forcing customers to wait on hold for hours. So much was changing so fast at the agency, the employee said.

In recent weeks, Robert Raniolo, 67, a retired financial analyst in New York, found himself stuck when he tried to update his emergency contact by designating his niece instead of his wife, who has dementia.

Since he began receiving retirement benefits five years ago, Raniolo has never missed a payment or had trouble getting online, he said. But this time he got an error message — and kept getting them. "Bad Request," read one notification, according to a screenshot he provided to The Washington Post. "There has been an unexpected system error," read another.

He was directed to try again during "regular service hours" on the East Coast.

So Raniolo kept trying — three to five times a day, every day, for the next five days. He tried at different times. He tried using his phone instead of his Chromebook. He tried different internet browsers: Chrome, Edge, DuckDuckGo.

Nothing worked. By last Monday evening, he still had not managed to get into his account to change his emergency contact.

He has begun to imagine the worst. What if something happens to him overnight, leaving his wife the only person authorized to communicate with Social Security on his behalf?

She probably wouldn't know to call 911 if he collapsed on the floor, Raniolo said. She certainly wouldn't understand how to manage or consider financial matters.

"If you were to call her right now, she wouldn't know how to answer the phone," Raniolo said. "That's why it's so frustrating to me I can't make a simple transaction on the Social Security website."

In Westborough, Massachusetts, outside Boston, last Monday, Chris Hubbard checked the Facebook feed where the statewide community of parents of disabled children receiving SSI benefits posts news and information and saw that a friend logging in to the Social Security website was notified that her child was not receiving benefits. Hubbard and her husband, Tom, have a profoundly autistic son. The monthly check to pay for the group home where he lives was ready to go into the mail the next morning, the first of the month, when his SSI check always hits his bank accounts. When Hubbard logged in, her son's account also showed "no history of payments."

"My mind was racing," she recalled. She envisioned going through the agonizing process of reapplying for benefits for her son. She couldn't sleep and continued to check the website until 2:30 a.m. Same message.

On Tuesday, the check had finally been deposited by 9 a.m. But the message, now clearly an error, was still up on the website until that afternoon. "The whole thing was very alarming," Hubbard said.

What readers are saying

The comments express strong concerns about the recent IT staff cuts and website outages at the Social Security Administration, suggesting these actions are deliberate attempts to undermine the system.

Many commenters believe this is part of a broader strategy to privatize Social... [Show more](#)

This summary is AI-generated. AI can make mistakes and this summary is not a replacement for reading the comments.

Exhibit C



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SOCIAL SECURITY

'Atypical': Social Security Administration reveals what it says caused website errors

The Administration confirmed the website "went down," but said the errors did not have anything to do with the Department of Government Efficiency or cuts being made

By NBC Chicago Staff • Published April 8, 2025 • Updated on April 8, 2025 at 2:38 pm

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If a surprise payment in the \$6,000 range shows up in your bank account from the Social Security Administration, it's legit! NBC 5 Responds has been hearing from retirees who say they've received the extra cash, but they don't know why.

The Social Security Administration on Tuesday addressed outages being reported on its website and access issues for some users as a new deadline calling for more online usage nears.

The Administration confirmed the website "went down," but said the errors did not have anything to do with the Department of Government Efficiency or cuts being made.

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"SSA website went down because of atypical high volume and it's a 1979 platform. It had nothing to do with DOGE," the agency wrote on social media. "In fact, this problem has alerted to an issue that DOGE will promptly fix."



Social Security 
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SSA website went down because of atypical high volume and it's a 1979 platform. It had nothing to do with DOGE. In fact, this problem has alerted to an issue that DOGE will promptly fix.

10:47 AM · Apr 8, 2025

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The post came in response to a [Washington Post](#) report that indicated "retirees and disabled people are facing chronic website outages and other access problems," citing "current and former officials" in noting the network issues may be related to a software update that ultimately crashed when it couldn't handle the high level of users.

On Monday, the administration noted plans were underway to "launch a public dashboard for showing system performance.

"While the [#SocialSecurity](#) website has faced challenges, these issues predate the current Administration. Our new Chief Information Officer has prioritized improving website uptime and resilience," the SSA wrote on X, formerly Twitter.


 Not found

Website Performance (2/2): And plans are underway to launch a public dashboard for showing system performance.

— [SocialSecurity_Press \(@SSAPress\)](#) [April 7, 2025](#)

The issues come as April checks begin to roll out for many and [just days away from shift](#) that will see some users forced to verify their identity online or go to an SSA office.

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Payment schedule for April

Supplemental Security Income was slated to go out on April 1, while most other forms of payments are based on birthdays. The only exception is for those who received Social Security before May 1997 or those receiving both Social Security and SSI. In that case, Social Security is paid on the third of the month and SSI on the first.

For those whose birthday are between the 1st and the 10th of their birth month, payments will be distributed starting April 9. For those with birthdays between the 11th and the 20th, payments go out on the third Wednesday of the month, which is April 16. And for those between the 21st and 31st, payments will go out on April 23.

Changes in store

[Fast-moving changes](#) at the Social Security Administration [have prompted concerns](#) that it may be more difficult for beneficiaries to access the agency's services. Some experts raised concerns that efforts to update the agency's systems could impact the [continuity of benefits](#).

"Now I'm concerned that benefits could get disrupted," said Jason Fichtner, a former deputy commissioner at the Social Security Administration who was appointed by President George W. Bush.

Recent changes that have been announced by the agency are cause for concern, experts including Fichtner say.

The changes were slated to begin Monday, but the agency [delayed the rollout](#) following feedback and concerns.

"We have listened to our customers, Congress, advocates, and others, and we are updating our policy to provide better customer service to the country's most vulnerable populations," Lee Dudek, acting commissioner of Social Security, said [in a statement last week](#).

Not only did the administration delay the start date for the new requirements, it also changed who is required to follow the new rules.

"In addition to extending the policy's effective date by two weeks to ensure our employees have the training they need to help customers, Medicare, Disability, and SSI applications will be exempt from in-person identity proofing because multiple opportunities exist during the decision process to verify a person's identity," Dudek's statement read.



MAR 31

Social Security changes: When do new requirements take effect? What to know



MAR 28

Chicago organization aims to help clients navigate social security benefits

The new start date for the changes will shift from March 31 to April 14, the agency announced.

Previous announcements had said anyone applying for cash benefits or changing their direct deposit information would need to provide proof of identity. Those who receive payment via paper checks will also need to prove their identity before changing their mailing address.

Those who don't have a my Social Security account would need to visit an office in person to verify their identity.

But among the newest updates are several exceptions. That means anyone applying for Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicare or Supplemental Security Income who can't verify their identity online will be allowed to complete their claims over the phone "without the need to come into an office."

Now, the office said anyone who "cannot use their personal [my Social Security](#) account to apply for benefits will only need to prove their identity at a Social Security office if applying for Retirement, Survivors, or Auxiliary (Spouse or Child) benefits."

"SSA will enforce online digital identity proofing or in-person identity proofing for these cases. The agency will not enforce these requirements in extreme dire-need situations, such as terminal cases or prisoner pre-release scenarios. SSA is currently developing a process that will require documentation and management approval to bypass the policy in such dire need cases," the administration said.

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Exhibit D

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Social Security wrongly told disabled people and some seniors their benefits ended, causing alarm



By Aimee Picchi
 Edited By Alain Sherter
 April 8, 2025 / 9:50 AM EDT / CBS News



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In Speaker Johnson's Louisiana district, Medicaid is a lifeline



The Social Security Administration last week wrongly informed some recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the federal

program that provides financial assistance to disabled Americans and low-income senior citizens, that they were no longer receiving benefits.

The agency's website informed some SSI recipients they are "currently not receiving payments," according to an April 7 letter from senators Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Ron Wyden of Oregon and Mark Kelly of Arizona to Social Security Administration Acting Commissioner Lee Dudek.

The payment history and all data about benefits for SSI recipients had also vanished, they wrote, adding that they received multiple reports from constituents about the error.

"In my 50 years of work on Social Security and SSI, I have never heard of this happening before," said Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, an advocacy group for the program, of the SSI error.

Chris Hubbard, whose 37-year-old disabled adult son relies on the program to pay for his group home, told CBS MoneyWatch she became aware of the problem on March 31, when people in a Facebook group for mothers of autistic children flagged the problem.

Hubbard, who lives with her husband in Westborough, Massachusetts, said she checked her son's account and was alarmed to find a similar message, leading her to stay up through the night to keep refreshing the page. She fell asleep at 5 a.m. without seeing a change, she said.

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"I was continuing to be worried because the message was still on the site, saying this beneficiary doesn't receive payments," Hubbard said.

The next morning, however, the correct information was on her son's page, and the money was deposited on April 1, as scheduled. But she and her husband say they received no outreach from Social Security about the problem, or an explanation of the error. They opted against calling the agency because of the long waits now often required to get someone on the phone.

The Hubbards said they're worried the glitch could signal more problems with the service, pointing to the potential impact of cuts to SSA's workforce.

"There's great concern about this happening again, and why did it happen in the first place?" Tom Hubbard said.

The Social Security Administration told CBS MoneyWatch that the issue was limited to SSI recipients, adding, it "did *not* impact Social Security or Medicare only beneficiaries." A spokesperson for the agency said, "This particular issue was resolved less than twenty-four hours later. All *my Social Security* user logins are again able to connect and view the proper benefit information."

DOGE changes

The SSI error is concerning because it impacts "some of the most vulnerable in the nation – low-income seniors and children and adults with disabilities – and [they] face extraordinary hardship if their benefits are delayed or disrupted," the senators wrote in their letter.

The SSI issue could be the result of changes happening at the Social Security Administration under Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, Altman said. Musk has claimed that the system is rife with fraud, and alleged the program is "the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time."

In recent weeks, the Social Security website has suffered from a number of outages that lasted as long as a day, according to an

April 7 Washington Post [report](#). The Social Security Administration told CBS MoneyWatch that the "brief disruptions" lasted about 20 minutes each, on average.

"Before Trump, Musk and DOGE took over, there were no major crashes or glitches on SSA's website to speak of," noted Maria Freese, senior Social Security expert at the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, an advocacy group focused on retirement issues. "Certainly there were no messages going out telling people erroneously that their benefits were discontinued."

The maximum monthly SSI payment is \$967 for an individual in 2025, with the program aimed at helping people with disabilities and seniors with no or little income. Most SSI recipients have income below the poverty line, [according to the Roosevelt Institute](#).

"SSI recipients experience economic precarity at high rates, and even brief disruptions to benefits could have devastating impacts for these beneficiaries," the senators wrote in their April 7 letter. "These recent reports of disruption—or threats of disruption—of Social Security benefits is deeply troubling."

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Aimee Picchi

Aimee Picchi is the associate managing editor for CBS MoneyWatch, where she covers business and personal finance. She previously

Social Security wrongly took away people and some seniors their benefits ended, causing harm

worked at Bloomberg News and has written for national news outlets including USA Today and Consumer Reports.



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Exhibit E

‘Just a Mess’: Staff Cuts, Rushed Changes and Anxiety at Social Security

President Trump promised not to touch Social Security, but as Elon Musk’s team trims staff and plans cuts to phone services, the system is groaning under the pressure.

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By Jack Healy, Alexandra Berzon, Tara Siegel Bernard and Nicholas Nehamas

Jack Healy reported from Glendale, Ariz.; Alexandra Berzon from Los Angeles; Tara Siegel Bernard from New York; and Nicholas Nehamas from Washington, D.C.

April 8, 2025

The line started forming outside the Social Security office in suburban Glendale, Ariz., not long after sunrise, dozens of retirees and people with disabilities, shuffling papers, some leaning on walkers, all anxious to know whether President Trump’s government overhaul had put their safety nets at risk.

When 9 a.m. came, an employee emerged from the building with fliers asking the crowd to come back — once they had scheduled an appointment.

“I’ve called for days!” one woman yelled.

“We came from a long ways away,” said another. Still another let everyone know they had been handed a load of bunk, though she used a more colorful term.

With the stock market in turmoil and the economy under threat, beneficiaries might see their monthly Social Security checks as predictable amid the chaos rippling out of Washington. After all, Mr. Trump has promised not to cut Social Security benefits for the 73 million Americans enrolled.

But that promise has not insulated the Depression-era program once deemed the third rail of American politics. Thousands of worried and frustrated recipients have thronged local field offices, asking why the phone lines are jammed, whether their local offices will be closed by Elon Musk's team of software engineers and technology executives and whether they will lose their benefits.

Waves of buyouts and early retirements have hobbled the staff at many local offices, and recipients say it has become harder to use the agency's website and phone systems, or even be seen in person.

Where field offices are losing more than a quarter of their staff

This map shows only staff members who accepted the one-time buyout offer. It doesn't reflect those who opted into other programs, such as early retirement or deferred resignation.



Source: Social Security Administration • By Zach Levitt

Those difficulties come as a deadline looms, imposed under the influence of Mr. Musk's cost-cutting initiative called the Department of Government Efficiency as the billionaire presidential adviser crusades against what he imagines to be legions of beneficiaries who do not qualify for Social Security benefits. On April 14, the agency plans to largely phase out phone services for people filing for retirement

and survivor benefits or changing their direct deposit information, forcing them to file online or come into the office, part of the administration's broader effort to combat fraud that it has done little to prove exists.

The Social Security Administration could end up exempting some from the edict, but as April 14 approaches, calls to the agency have risen by 30 percent compared with last year, and more callers are getting busy signals or being disconnected, according to data published by Social Security.

"I didn't know he was going to pull this," said Teresa Boswell, whose vote for Mr. Trump in November helped flip Arizona, but who found herself fuming outside the Social Security office in Glendale last week, unable to sign up for \$1,200 in monthly benefits after she retired from her job processing legal papers. "This is a joke."

According to Liz Huston, a spokeswoman for the White House, "President Trump has made it clear that he is committed to making the federal government more efficient without compromising mission-critical operations. He has promised to protect Social Security, and every recipient will continue to receive their benefits."

The Social Security Administration did not respond to a request for comment.

The problems roiling the Social Security system stem from two of the Trump administration's central obsessions: slashing federal payrolls as quickly as possible and rooting out fraud in the federal government.

About 2,800 Social Security employees have taken buyouts or early retirements promoted by Mr. Musk's group, according to agency data.

Staffing levels at the Social Security Administration were already at 50-year lows, and the departure of so many workers who answered phones and worked at field-office counters has led to longer lines and phone waits, according to interviews with more than a dozen internal field office and high-level employees.

In the small town of Wisconsin Rapids, the field office is losing seven employees, more than half of its 11-person staff.

“They lost a good portion of the people that do the most complicated work,” said Greg Bachinski, an official with the local unit of the federal workers union.

All told, more than three dozen offices are losing at least a quarter of their employees, with many located in rural areas that supported Mr. Trump, according to the agency.

Are you a federal worker? We want to hear from you.

The Times would like to hear about your experience as a federal worker under the second Trump administration. We may reach out about your submission, but we will not publish any part of your response without contacting you first.

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Further job cuts are likely: The Social Security Administration has said it wants to shed 7,000 of its 57,000 employees, with the additional cuts coming from headquarters. Mr. Musk’s team is pushing to cut departments that perform key services like technology support by 50 percent or more, according to people familiar with the matter.

At the same time, the intense focus by Mr. Musk’s team on weeding out fraud within Social Security — while top administration officials continue to circulate misinformation about fraud levels — has led to policy announcements that have caused beneficiaries to worry they might lose access to the system or have their benefits cut.

Reducing fraud, particularly involving direct deposits, has long been a focus at the agency, with teams working on minimizing the consequences and costs of scams. But the problems reported have been small in scale compared to the size of the agency and total payments made.

The April 14 requirement for online applications does not apply to people seeking disability benefits, Supplemental Security Income, or Medicare. But many seeking benefits have no clear understanding of what is happening or what is being asked of them.

The White House has grown worried enough about the political fallout from the long lines and wait times that White House officials are pressuring Social Security administrators to reduce the information they put online that could draw attention to problems, according to a person briefed on the discussions.

But increasingly, the public knows about the issues. Virender Kanwal, a biology professor in New Jersey, applied for retirement benefits online at the end of February, a few months before her 70th birthday. She said she knew she would have to provide proof of her citizenship to complete the process but did not want to risk mailing in her passport, so she planned to visit a field office. To do so, she needed an appointment, and those need to be secured over the phone.

Ms. Kanwal said she called daily for weeks but never got through. Each time, a recorded message said there was a two-hour wait and to call back later, and the call disconnected. Then she received a letter in late March saying her application would be denied if she did not provide her documents within 12 days.

She began calling every few minutes, and said she was eventually placed on hold for six and a half hours before an agent finally answered just before midnight and gave her an appointment.

“This is not what we expect from our country,” Ms. Kanwal said.

In Poughkeepsie, N.Y., a 90-year-old man using a walker came to a field office because he thought he had to prove he was still alive. In Clinton, S.C., a woman with one leg fell down in the parking lot after coming into the office to show her identification.

In Southern California, older people with disabilities are spending hours taking public buses to get to Social Security offices only to be turned away, nonprofit groups said.

“People just don’t know what’s going to happen,” said Bob Kelley, founder of the San Diego Seniors Foundation. “Everything is up in the air, so it’s just confusion right now.”

Some services offered on the agency's website have also been crashing more often because a new anti-fraud measure has overloaded the servers, according to employees briefed on the matter.

Jessica LaPointe, president of the American Federation of Government Employees Council 220, which represents agency workers nationwide, said system outages were common, but that "it is unusual that they are happening at this frequency." To be sure, the technical systems the offices use are old and complex, and employees experienced periodic outages in the past, but the current changes have been far more disruptive, according to employees and advocates.

The agency has tried to address longer lines and phone waits by giving workers out of the agency's Baltimore-area headquarters the option to relocate to offices in the field. So far, around 2,200 have accepted, the agency has said.

The agency's acting commissioner, Leland Dudek, has broadcast some of the frustrations. Shortly after taking office, he began posting videos of Social Security's regular meetings on YouTube, an apparent effort to make the agency's operations more transparent.

During the meetings, Social Security officials candidly acknowledged that visitors were having trouble using the agency's online portal, My SSA, and were visiting field offices in large numbers because they were "afraid of our systems going down." They also discussed wanting the White House to make a statement to help calm people's fears.

"Can you ask the White House press secretary if she wants to record a blurb and get the message out there?" Mr. Dudek, a midlevel fraud official at the agency who was elevated to be Social Security's temporary chief, asked his staff in a March 28 operational meeting.

That never happened.

Many of the people waiting without appointments outside the Glendale office last week trickled away after getting the printout telling them how to schedule an appointment. But Bonnie Baum, 68, a resident of the sprawling 55-and-older

community Sun City West, decided to stick it out in the hopes of talking to someone.

She said her application for \$1,800 in monthly retirement benefits had been rejected because she did not file the paperwork on time. She had been unable to reach anyone on the phone, and said she had enough difficulty navigating her smartphone, much less Social Security's online system.

“It’s just a mess,” she said. Then she sat down and waited.

Christina Morales, Mitch Smith and Soumya Karlamangla contributed reporting.

Jack Healy is a Phoenix-based national correspondent who focuses on the fast-changing politics and climate of the Southwest. He has worked in Iraq and Afghanistan and is a graduate of the University of Missouri's journalism school.

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Nicholas Nehamas is a Washington correspondent for The Times, focusing on the Trump administration and its efforts to transform the federal government.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: Social Security Strains as Cuts Take Their Toll

Exhibit F

LOCAL NEWS

Callers experience long wait times, disconnects with Social Security

According to SSA data, March saw more than 483,000 calls per day into the call center. However, just 39% of those callers reached a representative.



Author: Collin Dorsey
Published: 6:49 PM EDT April 9, 2025
Updated: 6:49 PM EDT April 9, 2025



COLUMBUS, Ohio — Calling the Social Security Administration's 800 number has left a lot of people frustrated. Wait times are increasing and so are the number of callers who never speak to an agent.

According to SSA data available on Wednesday, March saw more than 483,000 calls per day into the call center. However, just 39% of those callers reached a representative. That's down from May 2024, when 70% of callers reached a representative.

Nancy LeaMond, the executive vice president and chief advocacy & engagement officer for AARP, sent a letter Monday to Lee Dudek, the acting commissioner of the SSA.

In that letter, LeaMond said the nonprofit continues to “receive thousands of calls and messages from older Americans who are concerned about their Social Security. We also continue to see numerous reports of Social Security Administration (SSA) website crashes and outages, long waits at overwhelmed field offices, and increasing phone hold times and disconnections when trying to contact customer service representatives. This chaotic environment is fueling fear and concern among many older Americans.”

LeaMond went on to say AARP is “deeply troubled” by what it called “the startling and sudden decline in customer service from the agency.”

According to the official X account for the Social Security Administration, it is walking back its proposed cuts to phone service.

On Tuesday evening, the agency posted, “Beginning on April 14, [#SocialSecurity](#) will perform an anti-fraud check on all claims filed over the telephone and flag claims that have fraud risk indicators.” Going on to say, “Individuals who are not flagged will be able to complete their claim without any in-person requirements,” and “telephone remains a viable option to the public.”

“We have some good news on that front,” said Bill Sweeney, senior vice president of government affairs for AARP. “Just last night, Social Security announced that they were backtracking on some of the new requirements that would require people to go in person to a field office to try to get one of those appointments in order to get some things done.”

Sweeney said AARP is advising people to call early in the day if they need to reach an agent because wait times only increase as the day goes on.

If someone needs to make an in-person appointment at a field office, they should make that appointment right away because appointments can sometimes take a month or more to get at a local field office.

“We’re hearing more and more that people need to get these appointments,” said Sweeney. “They need to set up in-person meetings to do things that you used to be able to do over the phone and so people are requesting meetings in person, which then adds to the backlog.”

Social Security is also trying to correct the record on reports about certain field offices permanently closing.

A March 27 news release said the reports were false and the agency has not permanently closed or announced the permanent closure of any local field office.

It said, “From time to time, SSA must temporarily close a local field office for reasons such as weather, damage, or facilities issues, and it reopens when the issues are resolved.”

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Exhibit G

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As cuts hit Social Security, Chicago-area residents call it a ‘disaster for ordinary people’

With new policies forcing people to confirm their identities in person to receive benefits, some Chicago-area residents fear they and others may struggle to get the benefits they rely on.

By [Violet Miller](#) and [Clare Lane](#) | Apr 22, 2025, 11:57am PDT



People line up as they wait for the Social Security Administration's office to open in Evanston. | Pat Nabong/Sun-Times

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Vallabh Patel's wife, 62, recently started having trouble walking due to a medical condition. The couple tried to set up Social Security disability payments for her, but they

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Frustrated, they headed to the Evanston office of the Social Security Administration last week, hoping to get her enrolled for payments based on her age. They were greeted by a long line of other people also trying to get help. Though they eventually got the enrollment process started, they have a ways to go to get benefits for her.

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“The system is broken,” said Patel, 70, of Skokie. There are “too many complications that need to be addressed. ... It’s a disaster for ordinary people who need this money for their daily life, ordinary people like us.”

Patel, who is working but already receives benefits himself, is among the 2.3 million people in Illinois who rely on Social Security — a fraction of the more than 73.2 million, including retirees and children, who receive retirement and disability benefits nationwide.

He fears things will only get worse since the Trump administration announced major changes and staffing cuts at SSA offices around the country.

The SSA plans to [shutter](#) 47 Social Security offices nationwide, including 26 this month, and has already laid out plans to lay off [thousands of workers](#), which could potentially expand to [half of the agency's entire staff](#).

Meanwhile, the agency kicked off widespread confusion last month when it announced people seeking benefits or changing their direct deposit information could no longer verify

Currently, those who can't verify their identity over the agency's online or phone services are required to visit a field office in person. The change will apply to new applicants who are flagged by the new fraud detection systems and existing recipients who want to change their direct deposit information.

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Social Security cost-of-living boost in 2025 is not enough, some Chicagoans say

The upheaval comes as 2025 sees the smallest **cost-of-living adjustment** since 2021, amounting to 2.5%, or a little more than \$50 a month. Many say they have since struggled to keep up with **inflated grocery prices** and **skyrocketing housing costs** — which recent studies have shown make up a **disproportionate amount of Chicagoans' spending**.

For Patel, property taxes are some of his biggest expenses after he cleaned out his retirement accounts to send his kids to college. When he stops working in a few years, he and his wife will be fully reliant on Social Security and savings. It's made him cut back on groceries and stopped him from replacing his nearly 30-year-old car.

"I've never received a single penny or anything free in my life," said Patel, who has worked various jobs for nearly 50 years, in factories and, most recently, making highway signs. "If I have limited income, how am I going to pay property taxes?"

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At the SSA office in Kenwood, neighborhood resident Joshua Wilkins said the changes to the system could turn Social Security into a "broken promise." The warehouse worker

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“Twenty years ago, I thought I’d fall back on Social Security just to eat and live,” said Wilkins, 46, who went to the office to get a replacement Social Security card. “As much money as we all pay in taxes, as much hard work we all do, especially veterans, there shouldn’t be any fear whether they’ll have a house over their head or [have to] choose between medication and food.”

He said he has considered getting on disability himself and working part time since he qualifies due to illness, but he was dissuaded because it felt “greedy” since he is still able to work.

Now, seeing the federal government making cuts to the system, he thinks the money saved on cutting federal workers isn’t “about saving money at all.” It will go for tax cuts to corporations like Walmart, he said, which exploited communities like his by opening stores, establishing a monopoly and then [closing them](#) in recent years.

He fears staffing cuts will make it harder to collect payments people have earned.

“There’ll be a lot of people who will lose benefits. ... I just hope I can adjust and save some money of my own, because the government isn’t going to keep its promises,” he said.

James Stewart, a 65-year-old Lincoln Square resident, went to the office in his neighborhood last Friday to sort out some issues with his Medicare account. He said he was frustrated that he had to call several times to get an appointment, and then had to wait two hours for what ended up taking 10 minutes to fix.

He disagrees with those who think the staffing cuts will hurt service. With less staff, he said he expects wait times to drop because it’ll force “useless” federal employees to “work harder.”

Social Security workers “do nothing. It’s like the easiest job in the world,” Stewart claimed. “They’ve got nothing on their plate. Put something on there for once.”

Contributing: Associated Press



Exhibit H

 [HOMEPAGE](#)

POLITICS 

Musk Goons Purged Living U.S. Citizens from Social Security

 **RESURRECTION DAY**

Elon Musk and his DOGE foot soldiers effectively killed the financial lives of “countless” citizens through their database meddling.



Michael Daly
Special Correspondent

Updated Apr. 24 2025 6:59AM EDT
Published Apr. 23 2025 10:41PM EDT



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What might be called Day of the Dead Living is being continually played out at a Social Security Administration (SSA) office in upstate New York, and likely across the country.

"We have people who did not receive benefits come in every day with their ID and say, 'I'm not dead, I'm alive!' says Rennie Glasgow, a claims technical analyst with 15 years of experience at the agency who handles the most challenging cases at the Schenectady office.

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These supposed dead are not to be confused with more than 6,000 living immigrants the Trump administration moved to the SSA Death Master File (DMF) in an attempt to force them to self-deport by depriving them of the ability to work legally.

Many more American citizens were wrongly consigned to the DMF after Elon Musk's DOGE goons bullied their way onto the SSA's databases and mistakenly decided that "countless" people listed as 120 years old and older were receiving benefits.

"[DOGE staffers] went into the system and they killed off people," Glasgow told the Daily Beast. "About 4 million people, they marked them as dead. But they're not sure if those people were supposed to be marked as dead, so they're sending us an email saying, 'If these people come into the office with their identification, you can reinstate them.'"

The 55-year-old father of six added, "So we're going to be resurrecting a lot of dead people."

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Rennie Glasgow, pictured, is critical of Elon Musk and DOGE's involvement with the Social Security Administration.

Courtesy of Rennie Glasgow

And restoring financial life is never simple.

“We have to go through this long process to resurrect them, to get them back as alive, which can take about three to four days,” Glasgow said.

He noted that until people get off the DMF, they endure a kind of financial death.

“When they mark someone dead on the Social Security record, it stops their life,” he said. “It stops their car payments, it stops their credit, it stops their ability to do anything. Their identification gets flagged. And most times those things have to go to the payment center.”

The system’s payment centers have suffered DOGE cutbacks that have at least doubled and maybe tripled the wait people must endure.

“What used to take 15 days to get done when we send something to a payment center is now taking about 30 to 45,” Glasgow reported.

‘I Know Musk’s Secret Blueprint to Destroy Social Security’

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staffing shortage. And a person could finally step up to a window after a three-hour wait only to encounter more DOGE-induced inefficiency.

“Every day, between the hours of 10 to about 12, our system goes down,” Glasgow told The Daily Beast. “So it’s not just that people are sitting there, waiting for us to help them. When they get to the window, they’re told, ‘Our system is down. We can’t help you. We don’t know what’s going on.’”

The staffing might get even tighter. Glasgow says that on Friday, DOGE sent out a renewed offer of a lump sum of \$20,000 for early retirement.

DOGE is simultaneously making the workday more stressful for the remaining staff.

“Every day there is a new email that is either derogatory, disgusting, [or] threatening,” Glasgow said.



Elon Musk during a Cabinet meeting at the White House.

Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

In the DOGE era, even missives that might have otherwise seemed positive can have a malevolent undertone.

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and we will continue with our efficiency push to maximize customer service,'" Glasgow said on Wednesday.

The DOGE-controlled SSA did not respond to a request for comment.

Glasgow, who is vice president of the union representing the region's SSA workers, Local 3343 of the American Federation of Government Employees, cannot help but feel there is a deliberate effort to sabotage the heretofore-popular SSA to the point that the public will turn against it. The next step would be privatization and access to the trillions in the SSA coffers.

Ex-Social Security Head: This Is When Musk Will Stop Checks

ZERO DAY

Michael Daly



Whatever the motive, the purported "efficiency" people are creating onerous inefficiencies.

"It's crazy," Glasgow said.

Glasgow figures it will all continue even if Musk reduces his direct involvement next month, as he said he will this week.

Whether or not Musk goes, the Day of the Dead Living seems sure to continue.

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